

World Development Report (WDR) 2018 to focus on education; civil society responds

Realising the Promise of Education for Development



The 2018 World Development Report of the World Bank – *Realizing the Promise of Education for Development* – is the first ever devoted to education.

Every year, the World Bank’s World Development Report (WDR) covers a topic of central importance to global development. The 2018 WDR – *Realizing the Promise of Education for Development* – is the first ever devoted to education, and now is an excellent time for it: education is critical for human welfare and key to achieving global Sustainable Development Goals.

The WDR also represents an opportunity to take stock of what we know and to provide guidance on how to expand the scope and quality of education around the world. It aims to lay the foundations for a sustained policy focus on learning outcomes and skills for life and work, and to provide guidance on how education systems can be reformed to deliver them.

This WDR will offer guidance on how to integrate education, learning, and skills with the drive to meet broader development challenges. The [four themes](#) explored by WDR 2018 are –

1. The promise of education: Education is a powerful instrument for eradicating poverty and promoting shared prosperity, but fulfilling its potential requires better policies and delivery—both within and outside the education system.
2. The learning crisis: Despite gains in education access, recent learning assessments show that many children and youth are leaving school unequipped with even the most foundational skills they need for life and work.
3. Promising interventions to improve learning: Recent developments in brain science and evaluations of innovations have identified interventions that promote learning. They show how inputs can be used effectively to deploy strong management and governance at schools with context-specific innovation.
4. Achieving learning at scale: Achieving learning at the level of entire education systems will need more than just scaling up effective interventions. Change requires overcoming technical and political barriers, and deploying salient metrics for tracking issues and progress, among other interventions

The Global Campaign for Education (GCE), while responding to the report, welcomed its recognition of education as a human right and that past failures, which have led to underinvestment in education, have had a far reaching impact. The emphasis given to the critical role of early childhood education, the importance of community participation in educational reform, the need for stronger focus on the teaching profession, and for better classroom-focussed support was also welcomed by GCE.

However, GCE also shared fundamental concerns with some of the report’s specific framing with –

- (1) Regression from the global consensus reached around the SDGs - The report outline breaks away from the well-negotiated consensus established as



The WDR aims to lay the foundations for a sustained policy focus on learning outcomes and skills for life and work, and to provide guidance on how education systems can be reformed to deliver them.

World Development Report (WDR) 2018 to focus on education; civil society responds

Realising the Promise of Education for Development



SDG commitments call for curricula that promote education for sustainable development, peace education, and global citizenship education. GCE expressed fear that omitting these dimensions would skew global investment and efforts in the coming years.

part of the SDG negotiations of what really matters in terms of education, bringing the focus back on the narrowly defined learning crisis. At the same time, while a crisis in learning is real, it is just one of the manifestations of a bigger education crisis. Education should not only ensure literacy and numeracy, but also promote creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking. SDG commitments call for curricula that promote education for sustainable development, peace education, and global citizenship education. The GCE expressed fear that omitting these dimensions would skew global investment and efforts in the coming years. By calling for complete alignment of educational systems to attainment of learning outcomes (especially as defined by standardized tests with a focus on reading and math) there are likely to be dangerous unintended outcomes on education systems in their totality.

This is increasingly recognised even in the USA where evidence points to the need to move away from narrow testing.

- (2) Failure to address the crisis of access - Based on current trends, universalisation of upper secondary education would only be attained by 2084. Even completion of primary education will take place only in 2042 (GEM Report, 2016). The concept note, furthermore, remains silent on the issue of adult education, despite the 758 million adults who cannot read and write.
- (3) Failure to address the crisis of equity - The report needs to recognise that education systems that focus on improving equity perform better than those that prioritise outcomes. Besides, the right to non-discrimination and equality, which is universally legally binding, puts the obligation on states to develop education systems that are able to redress inequalities, and the failure to do so is a legal breach.
- (4) Failure to address core issues of quality, responsible for poor levels of learning–
 - a. The outline disappoints in dismissing the role of pedagogical inputs and infrastructure in learning. Quality teaching is dependent on the presence of a strong, comprehensive, and relevant curriculum, availability of appropriate and locally contextualised teaching learning materials, and the presence of safe, secure, child-friendly, and inclusive learning environments.
 - b. Having sound evidence of impact of educational policies is critical and this entails strengthening how learning is assessed and monitored.
 - c. The WDR should avoid reasserting internationally comparable standardised tests of literacy and numeracy, but provide a



GCE expressed disappointment that the WDR dismisses the role of pedagogical inputs and infrastructure in learning. Quality teaching is dependent on the presence of a strong, comprehensive, and relevant curriculum, and the presence of safe, secure, child-friendly, and inclusive learning environments.

World Development Report (WDR) 2018 to focus on education; civil society responds

Realising the Promise of Education for Development



GCE urged the WDR to put forward recommendations for how best to conduct higher level strategic dialogue on education financing and push for increased budget transparency.

balanced view that recognises the downsides of standardised testing. The report should emphasise that some high performing educational systems do not rely on standardised tests for validation (e.g. Finland). At the same time, efforts must be made to ensure adequate, regular, transparent availability of data on all metrics of educational performance, including the entire set of SDG4 thematic and global indicators, not only information on learning outcomes.

d. Teachers must be put at the heart of the report since no educational system can deliver quality education without quality teachers.

e. According to UNESCO, one out of every 113 people on earth has been displaced due to conflict or persecution, and 51% of the world's refugees are children. Any discussion of the global learning crisis would be incomplete without addressing the educational needs of this group.

(5) Crisis of financing - It is surprising to see a World Bank report silent on the role of educational financing since none of the aspects needing strengthening can be improved without financial allocations. It is crucial that the WDR recognises, in line with the latest PISA findings, that among poorer countries the amount of public spending per pupil is associated with higher test scores (and that this only shifts when countries spend over \$50,000 per pupil between 6 and 15 years old). For most countries, there is a strong correlation between increasing financing and improving learning (and equity and access). Over half of low income countries saw education's share of public expenditure decline since 2000. The report must, therefore, prioritise financing – how to provide sustainable financing for education through expanding the domestic tax base in progressive ways, spending a fair share of the budget on education, targeting education spending sensitively for increased equity, and ensuring appropriate scrutiny to avoid a misuse of education spending. The World Development Report could make a real difference by putting forward recommendations for how best to conduct higher level strategic dialogue on education financing and push for increased budget transparency – which might include addressing all the issues above.



In its review of the WDR, GCE highlighted the need to reiterate the need for institutionalised social dialogue around education, to include those working on the ground in decision making spaces, and ensure sustainable policy change.

(6) Public systems hold the key - Most children in developing countries study in public schools, most of the gains in enrolment in the preceding decades have likewise been the result of efforts by governments and the key to achieving reform at scale, a clear priority for this report, is to focus on making public schools and public education systems work. The WDR must commit itself to strengthening the quality of public education and reject for-profit, low-fee private schools, recognising that this is a model that deepens poverty, harms equity, and erodes quality education.

World Development Report (WDR) 2018 to focus on education; civil society responds

Realising the Promise of Education for Development

- (7) The crisis of shrinking citizen space - 2016 saw declines in political rights and civil liberties in 67 countries, compared with 36 that registered gains (Freedom House's Freedom Index, 2017). The WDR could reiterate the need for institutionalised social dialogue around education to leverage the experience of teacher unions and others working on the ground into spaces of decision making and to ensure sustainable policy change. In so doing, it can learn from the Global Partnership for Education's (GPE) country-level process and the work of the Civil Society Education Fund (CSEF).

In summary, the GCE's response stresses that the WDR 2018 regresses from the well negotiated consensus around the SDGs in terms of what matters in education, bringing the focus back on the narrowly-defined learning crisis, thus undermining the report's potential to trigger systemic change. It fails to do justice to issues of quality and equity and fails to reiterate the need for strengthening public education systems. A commitment to mobilising adequate financing would be particularly critical in a report from the World Bank.

This write-up is contains information appearing in a blog entitled ['Education is the topic for the new World Development Report'](#) and from GCE's response to the WDR 2018.

END